

Standard 7-2 The student will demonstrate an understanding of the concept of absolute monarchies and constitutional government in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

7-2.2 Summarize the ideas of the Enlightenment that influenced democratic thought and social institutions throughout the world, including the political philosophies of John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Baron de Montesquieu. (P, H)

Taxonomy Level: B 2 Understand/Conceptual Knowledge

Previous/future knowledge:

This is the first time students have been taught the ideas of the Enlightenment and the political philosophies of John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Baron de Montesquieu.

In Global Studies, students will explain the ways that Enlightenment ideas spread through Europe and their effect on European society, and the political and cultural influence of thinkers such as John Locke, Voltaire, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Baron de Montesquieu (GS-3.4).

It is essential for students to understand that the Enlightenment was seen as an intellectual movement of the 17th and 18th centuries which sought to apply “reason” to the human condition and thereby better understand and improve that condition. Politics - its structure, purpose, and execution - was one of the areas where “enlightened” philosophy was applied. To understand the political philosophy of the era, it is important for students to grasp the basic concepts behind the state of nature philosophy and the social contract theory. The *state of nature* was a positive condition of human existence that preceded social and political organization and was used by philosophers to explain the process by which political organization occurred. The *social contract theory* was the idea that government was created as an agreement (contract) between social groups as a way of structuring themselves in a mutually beneficial manner. These two components are an important part of the “template” used by philosophers during the Enlightenment to examine and classify government. It should be understood that philosophers could and did apply these ideas in different ways.

John Locke (English) is considered one of the great political philosophers of the Enlightenment. Influenced by the Glorious Revolution, Locke saw the state of nature as a good place and the social contract as a voluntary agreement to enhance life. According to Locke, government was to protect the rights of people and if it didn’t then the people had the right to abolish (break the contract) the government and create a new one. Locke’s writings had a strong influence on American patriots like Thomas Jefferson and the Declaration of Independence.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (French) had a similar belief about the state of nature but he differed on the role of government. Since Rousseau saw society as the corrupting influence on people, it was the role of government to protect the “general will” of the people. As such, it was the government’s duty to implement policies deemed beneficial for the general populace. American colonists largely rejected Rousseau, but his writings would later provide part of the foundation for totalitarian governments.

Baron de Montesquieu's (French) greatest contribution came in governmental organization by promoting the ideas of separation of powers and checks and balances. Montesquieu greatly admired the English system of unlimited government from which he garnered these concepts. These concepts did not originate with him, but he was largely responsible for popularizing them and the influence of his ideas is readily apparent in the U.S. Constitution.

It is not essential for students to know the titles of the political writings of these philosophers.

Assessment guidelines: Assessments should require students to have a **general understanding** of Enlightenment ideas about government and of these philosophers. It would be appropriate to have students **compare** the ideas and influence of each philosopher. Students could be asked to **defend** which ideas of the various philosophers are most important or influential.